




## Enhancing Early Childhood Social-Emotional Skills through Gardening Activities in Group A at Pelita Harapan Kindergarten

Sofia Jamiatul Rohmah

STIT Bandung Kampus II

Email : [sofijamiatulrohmah@gmail.com](mailto:sofijamiatulrohmah@gmail.com)

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### ABSTRACT

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*\*Corresponding Author*

[sofijamiatulrohmah@gmail.com](mailto:sofijamiatulrohmah@gmail.com)

This research is motivated by the low social-emotional abilities of children in Group A at TK Pelita Harapan, as indicated by difficulties in sharing, cooperating, and managing emotions appropriately. The purpose of this study is to improve children's social-emotional abilities through gardening activities. The method used is Classroom Action Research (CAR) with the Kemmis and McTaggart model implemented in two cycles. The research subjects were 15 children in Group A at TK Pelita Harapan. Data collection techniques included observation, documentation, and field notes. The results showed a significant improvement in children's social-emotional abilities. In the initial condition (pre-cycle), children's social-emotional abilities only reached 33.33% in the Developing as Expected (BSH) category. In Cycle I, it increased to 60.00%, and in Cycle II, it increased to 86.67%. Gardening activities have been proven to develop aspects of patience, responsibility, cooperation, empathy, and self-control through meaningful direct experiences. Thus, gardening activities can serve as an effective alternative learning method to improve social-emotional abilities in early childhood.

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## INTRODUCTION

Early Childhood Education (ECE) plays a crucial role in laying the foundation for children's holistic growth and development. According to Law Number 20 of 2003 concerning the National Education System, early childhood education is an educational effort aimed at children from birth to six years of age through the provision of educational stimulation that supports their physical and psychological development, enabling them to be prepared for further education. Among the various developmental domains that require early stimulation, social-emotional development is particularly important because it influences

children's ability to understand themselves, regulate emotions, build positive relationships, and adapt effectively to their social environment.

Social-emotional skills refer to an individual's ability to recognize, understand, and manage emotions while interacting constructively with others. In early childhood, these skills encompass self-awareness, emotional regulation, empathy, responsibility, cooperation, and prosocial behavior. Research has shown that children's social and emotional development is enhanced through meaningful interactions with teachers and peers in educational settings (Nurhasanah et al., 2021). Therefore, schools play a strategic role in creating learning environments and experiences that foster the development of social-emotional competencies. Moreover, strong social-emotional skills acquired during early childhood contribute significantly to children's future academic success, social adaptation, and overall well-being (Fitriya et al., 2022).

Despite its importance, the development of social-emotional skills among young children often encounters challenges. Preliminary observations conducted in Group A of Pelita Harapan Kindergarten revealed that many children demonstrated limited social-emotional competencies. Several issues were identified, including difficulties in sharing learning materials, cooperating with peers in group activities, managing emotions when faced with unfavorable situations, showing responsibility toward assigned tasks, and expressing empathy toward friends. Of the fifteen children observed, only five children (33.33%) achieved the category of Developing as Expected (BSH) in the social-emotional domain. These findings indicate the need for innovative and engaging learning activities that can effectively stimulate children's social-emotional development.

One learning activity considered highly relevant to addressing this issue is gardening. Gardening activities involve planting, caring for, and observing the growth of plants through direct interaction with nature. Such activities provide meaningful experiential learning opportunities that allow children to develop patience, responsibility, cooperation, empathy, and emotional awareness (Nasution et al., 2021; Oktavia et al., 2022). Gardening also aligns with the principles of experiential learning, which emphasize active participation and hands-on experiences. Through gardening, children learn to work collaboratively, share responsibilities, solve simple problems, and appreciate the process of growth and care. Previous studies have demonstrated that gardening activities positively influence children's motor skills, emotional development, sense of responsibility, and empathy toward living things (Siregar, 2024).

In addition to its educational benefits, gardening activities possess important environmental and character-building values. Children are introduced to the importance of caring for nature, maintaining environmental sustainability, and appreciating the resources provided by their surroundings. From an Islamic educational perspective, gardening can also cultivate gratitude toward Allah SWT and strengthen children's awareness of their role as *khalifah fil ard* (stewards of the earth). Therefore, gardening activities not only support

social-emotional development but also contribute to character education and environmental awareness among young learners.

Based on these considerations, this study aims to examine the implementation of gardening activities as a strategy for improving the social-emotional skills of Group A children at Pelita Harapan Kindergarten. Specifically, the study seeks to describe the learning process and determine the extent to which gardening activities contribute to improvements in children's social-emotional competencies. The findings are expected to provide practical contributions to the development of innovative and meaningful learning practices in early childhood education settings, particularly in fostering children's social-emotional growth through experiential and nature-based learning activities.

## **METHOD**

This study employed a Classroom Action Research (CAR) design using the spiral model developed by Kemmis and McTaggart, which consists of four interconnected stages: planning, action, observation, and reflection. The research was conducted in two cycles, with each cycle serving as a basis for improvement in the subsequent cycle. Reflection on the results of each cycle was used to identify strengths and weaknesses of the implemented actions, enabling continuous refinement of the learning process. The study was carried out during the second semester of the 2024/2025 academic year at Pelita Harapan Kindergarten. The participants were all children in Group A, consisting of 15 children aged 4–5 years, including 8 girls and 7 boys. The researcher acted as both the classroom practitioner and observer, assisted by the classroom teacher as a collaborator throughout the research process. Data were collected through several techniques to obtain comprehensive information regarding the development of children's social-emotional skills. Structured observation was conducted using observation sheets designed to record children's social-emotional behaviors during gardening activities. Documentation in the form of photographs and videos was used to capture learning activities and support the observation findings. In addition, field notes were maintained to record significant events, interactions, and behaviors that were not fully documented in the observation sheets. These various data sources enabled the researcher to obtain a holistic understanding of the learning process and children's responses during the implementation of gardening activities. The primary research instrument was an observation sheet developed based on the social-emotional development indicators for children aged 4–5 years as outlined in the Regulation of the Minister of Education and Culture of Indonesia Number 137 of 2014. The observed indicators included children's ability to cooperate with peers, share tools and materials, demonstrate responsibility in caring for plants, manage emotions, show empathy toward others, and interact positively with teachers and classmates. Assessment was categorized into four developmental levels: Not Yet Developed (BB), Beginning to Develop (MB), Developed as Expected (BSH),

and Very Well Developed (BSB). Data analysis employed both qualitative and quantitative descriptive approaches. Qualitative analysis was used to describe children's behaviors and learning experiences during gardening activities, while quantitative analysis was conducted by calculating the percentage of children who achieved the BSH and BSB categories. The study was considered successful when at least 75% of the children reached the expected developmental criteria in social-emotional skills.

## **RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

### **Result**

The study was conducted through two cycles of Classroom Action Research to improve the social-emotional skills of Group A children at Pelita Harapan Kindergarten through gardening activities. Prior to the implementation of the intervention, a pre-cycle observation was carried out to identify the initial condition of the children's social-emotional development. The observation results revealed that the majority of children had not yet achieved the expected level of social-emotional competence. Out of 15 children, only 5 children (33.33%) were categorized as Developed as Expected (BSH) and Very Well Developed (BSB), while the remaining 10 children (66.67%) were still categorized as Beginning to Develop (MB) and Not Yet Developed (BB). These findings indicated that the children experienced difficulties in cooperating with peers, sharing learning materials, taking responsibility for assigned tasks, controlling emotions, and showing empathy toward others. Therefore, the initial condition demonstrated the need for a learning strategy capable of providing meaningful experiences that could stimulate social-emotional growth.

The implementation of Cycle I focused on introducing gardening activities through the theme of plants, particularly vegetables. The activities included preparing planting media, filling pots and polybags with soil, planting spinach and kale seeds, and watering the plants regularly. The children were divided into small groups to encourage interaction and collaboration during the learning process. Throughout the activities, children were required to share tools, take turns using gardening equipment, and work together to complete planting tasks. These experiences provided opportunities for children to practice cooperation, communication, and responsibility in a natural and enjoyable learning environment. Observations conducted during Cycle I demonstrated positive changes in the children's behavior. Many children began to show greater willingness to cooperate with their peers and participate actively in group activities. They became more capable of sharing tools and waiting for their turn when using gardening equipment. In addition, several children showed increased responsibility by remembering to water their plants without constant reminders from the teacher. Quantitatively, the percentage of children who achieved the BSH and BSB categories increased from 33.33% in the pre-cycle to 60.00% in Cycle I. Specifically, 9 out of 15 children met the expected developmental criteria. Although this result reflected substantial improvement,

the achievement was still below the predetermined success indicator of 75%.

The reflection stage of Cycle I identified several factors that limited optimal achievement. Some children still required teacher guidance to cooperate effectively with their peers. Others displayed impatience when activities did not proceed according to their expectations, particularly when waiting for turns or observing that plant growth did not occur immediately. Moreover, the gardening activities in Cycle I primarily focused on planting and watering, which provided limited opportunities for children to experience the outcomes of their efforts. Consequently, several improvements were planned for Cycle II, including providing clearer instructions, increasing opportunities for collaborative interaction, incorporating harvesting activities, and strengthening positive reinforcement for desirable social-emotional behaviors. Cycle II was designed as an enhanced continuation of the first cycle. The activities included caring for plants from the previous cycle, planting mung beans that could germinate more quickly, observing plant growth, harvesting mature vegetables, and sharing the harvest with classmates. These activities provided more concrete and rewarding experiences for the children. The rapid growth of mung beans enabled children to observe visible results from their efforts within a short period, thereby increasing their enthusiasm and sense of responsibility. The harvesting and sharing activities also created opportunities for children to practice generosity, empathy, cooperation, and appreciation for collective achievements.

The observation results in Cycle II revealed significant improvements in all observed aspects of social-emotional development. Children demonstrated stronger responsibility by consistently caring for their plants and showing concern for their growth. Cooperation among peers became more visible as children willingly assisted one another during gardening activities and shared tools without conflict. Their ability to regulate emotions also improved, particularly when dealing with challenges or waiting for the results of their efforts. Furthermore, empathy was increasingly evident when children helped friends who encountered difficulties or forgot to complete their gardening responsibilities. As a result, 13 out of 15 children (86.67%) achieved the BSH and BSB categories, exceeding the predetermined success indicator. No children remained in the BB category, indicating substantial progress in overall social-emotional development.

Overall, the findings demonstrate a consistent and significant improvement in children's social-emotional skills throughout the research process. The percentage of children who achieved the expected developmental criteria increased from 33.33% in the pre-cycle, to 60.00% in Cycle I, and finally to 86.67% in Cycle II. This progression indicates that gardening activities served as an effective learning medium for fostering social-emotional development in early childhood. Through direct interaction with plants, peers, and the surrounding environment, children were able to develop essential social-emotional competencies, including cooperation, responsibility, patience, emotional regulation, empathy, and sharing behavior. The results suggest that

gardening activities provide meaningful experiential learning opportunities that support holistic child development and can be effectively integrated into early childhood education programs.

## Discussion

The findings of this study demonstrate that gardening activities effectively improved the social-emotional skills of Group A children at Pelita Harapan Kindergarten. The percentage of children achieving the categories of Developed as Expected (BSH) and Very Well Developed (BSB) increased substantially from 33.33% in the pre-cycle, to 60.00% in Cycle I, and finally to 86.67% in Cycle II. This progression indicates that gardening activities provided meaningful learning experiences that encouraged children to engage actively with their peers and environment. The improvement observed throughout the research confirms that social-emotional development is best stimulated through direct and authentic experiences rather than through teacher-centered instruction alone. One of the most significant improvements observed during the study was in the area of cooperation and social interaction. Gardening activities required children to work in groups, share tools, take turns, and complete tasks collectively. Such collaborative experiences naturally encouraged communication and teamwork among children. Through repeated interactions, children learned to negotiate, listen to others, and respect group agreements. These findings support the view of Elan et al. (2022), who argued that children's social-emotional development can be optimized through learning environments that are supportive, interactive, and responsive to children's developmental needs. The gardening activities created opportunities for children to practice social skills in real-life situations, making learning more meaningful and sustainable.

The findings also revealed considerable growth in children's sense of responsibility. Each child was assigned the task of caring for a plant, including watering and monitoring its growth. This responsibility encouraged children to develop a sense of ownership over their tasks and to understand the consequences of their actions. Children gradually realized that neglecting their plants could result in wilting or poor growth, while consistent care led to healthy development. Such experiences helped children internalize responsibility in a concrete manner. This finding aligns with the perspective of Fitriya et al. (2022), who emphasized that social-emotional competencies developed during early childhood contribute significantly to the formation of responsible behaviors and positive character traits later in life. Another important finding concerns the development of patience and emotional regulation. Gardening is inherently a process-oriented activity that requires waiting for seeds to germinate and plants to grow. Throughout the study, children learned that results cannot be achieved instantly and that consistent effort is necessary to achieve desired outcomes. This process helped children manage frustration and develop greater emotional control. During Cycle II, children displayed increased patience while observing plant growth and showed fewer negative emotional reactions when faced with

difficulties. These findings suggest that gardening activities provide valuable opportunities for children to practice delayed gratification and emotional self-regulation, which are important components of social-emotional competence.

The study also demonstrated improvements in empathy and prosocial behavior. As children worked together and observed the successes and challenges experienced by their peers, they became more willing to offer assistance and encouragement. For example, children often helped friends who had difficulty completing gardening tasks or reminded peers to water their plants. The harvesting and sharing activities conducted in Cycle II further strengthened prosocial values by encouraging children to distribute the harvest equally among classmates. Such experiences fostered empathy, caring attitudes, and an understanding of collective responsibility. These findings are consistent with Amalia et al. (2023), who highlighted empathy, cooperation, and helping behavior as essential dimensions of early childhood social-emotional development.

The effectiveness of gardening activities can also be explained through the principles of experiential learning, which emphasize learning through direct experience and reflection. Unlike conventional classroom instruction, gardening allows children to actively participate in meaningful activities that engage cognitive, emotional, social, and physical dimensions simultaneously. By interacting directly with plants and their environment, children constructed knowledge and social-emotional skills through firsthand experiences. This finding supports previous studies indicating that nature-based learning activities contribute positively to children's holistic development because they combine exploration, observation, cooperation, and responsibility within authentic contexts.

From an Islamic educational perspective, gardening activities also provide opportunities for the internalization of religious and moral values. Through caring for plants, children learn gratitude for Allah SWT's blessings, appreciate the beauty of creation, and develop a sense of responsibility as *khalifah fil ardh* (stewards of the earth). The activities encourage children to respect living things, care for the environment, and practice positive social behaviors such as helping and sharing. Therefore, gardening activities not only contribute to social-emotional development but also support character formation and value education in accordance with the goals of Islamic early childhood education. Consequently, gardening can be considered an effective and holistic learning strategy for fostering both social-emotional competencies and moral development among young children.

## CONCLUSION

This study concludes that gardening activities are an effective learning strategy for enhancing the social-emotional skills of Group A children at Pelita Harapan Kindergarten. The implementation of gardening activities through two cycles of Classroom Action Research resulted in a significant improvement in

children's social-emotional development, as evidenced by the increase in the percentage of children achieving the Developed as Expected (BSH) and Very Well Developed (BSB) categories, from 33.33% in the pre-cycle, to 60.00% in Cycle I, and 86.67% in Cycle II. Gardening activities successfully fostered important social-emotional competencies, including cooperation, responsibility, patience, emotional regulation, empathy, and sharing behavior. Through direct and meaningful experiences in planting, caring for, harvesting, and sharing plants, children were able to develop positive social interactions and greater emotional maturity. Furthermore, gardening activities provided opportunities for the integration of character education and Islamic values, such as gratitude, environmental awareness, and stewardship. Therefore, gardening can be recommended as an innovative and holistic learning approach for promoting social-emotional development in early childhood education settings.

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